



In the 11:00 service today I will not be preaching, as music will fill that time. Because many of the singers and musicians are not available to this service, I am preaching in this service, so you get a bonus message!

When I was in seminary, back in the early 80s, one of my professors spoke to our class about money. He told us that at some point in the course of our ministry a good many of us would be earning in six figures (I thought at the time he surely meant to count both sides of the decimal point). That brought a lot of excitement to the room. In the early 80s that was a lot of money. It's still a lot of money. It also stirred discussion about *how much is enough?* How much money is enough? \$30,000? \$50,000? \$65,000? \$100,000? \$1,000,000?

The 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm is, undoubtedly, one of the most beloved passages in all of Scripture. And this may be a strange thing to say, but sometimes I wonder what it is about the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm that is so beloved. I wonder because this psalm really challenges us and asks some very difficult things of us. It challenges us to slow down, and we're not people who are very good at slowing down. It asks us to trust God and not ourselves, and we aren't always very good at trusting anyone beyond ourselves. It asks us to care for others. It reminds us of the dangers of life and even of our mortality. It tells us that God wants to set us down at a dinner table with our enemies. And, in our focus for today, it asks us to find God to be sufficient – to be enough – for our lives. So much of what this psalm has to say runs completely counter to how we live in our modern age, but, thankfully, we still love the psalm.

This morning, we will focus on the idea of *enough*. The psalm begins with this affirmation – *the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*. That is phrased as a declaration – *I shall not want!* Let me ask you a question – does it seem a bit naïve to say, *I shall not want?* How many times a day do we say, or think, of something we want? Usually, we use the word *need* rather than *want*, because if we can convince ourselves that something is a *need* rather than a *want*, it's much easier to justify getting it. But if we are really being honest with ourselves, isn't it a bit naïve to say *I shall not want?* Really. Who lives that way, saying *I shall not want?* Anybody?

What does it mean to say *the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want?*

1. *It means we are the shepherds for others.*

Our local Ministerial Alliance ended a few years ago, unfortunately. Near the end of its lifespan, we spent a long time talking about the difficulty of meeting the many needs surrounding us in our community. Why didn't we just say *why worry about it?* Because while this psalm gives the image of God as our shepherd, there is something else that is implied. A shepherd, in Biblical days, most often

cared for sheep that belonged to someone else. This psalm, then, is a call to care for others, as God promises to care for us. As God is our shepherd, we are called to be a shepherd to others. We find this call multiple times throughout the Scriptures.

The book of James, which is so practical as to sometimes be painful, says, *If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?* (James 2:15-16).

In Mark 6 we read of the large crowd following Jesus, and Mark records this in verses 34-37 – *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd (underline emphasis mine). And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat."*

Why does it seem, that in spite of their trust, so many people don't have enough? Some people ask why God doesn't do more to help the millions of people in our world who need so much. I think the better question is *why does humanity let such things happen?* Why do I spend my money on unnecessary items when I know that money can make a difference to someone else? Could it be that God is waiting on us to put to use all of the resources given to us?

This is a very complicated, difficult, task, to be called as shepherd other people. We sometimes want to protest about how complicated it is to be a shepherd to others. We are tempted, as were the disciples, to push the responsibility off on God, but God's call is for us to be shepherds and care for others. The shepherd was in constant danger. There was the danger of attack by wild animals. There was the danger of others coming to steal the sheep. There was danger from the elements. There was the danger of not having enough food and water. It is very, very difficult to be called to shepherd other people. I think God has a pretty good idea of how difficult it is, but he still calls us to the task.

## 2. *It means we ask "how much is enough? What do we really need in life?"*

Several years ago there was a new reality show on TV, called *Preachers of LA*. All four of the ministers on the program lived in quite a bit of luxury. One scene showed one of the ministers and his wife in their garage discussing which car they would each drive that day. His wife chose a high end Mercedes, and as she backed the Mercedes out of the garage of this grand home, her minister husband said *be careful you don't hit the Bentley*. I can't tell you how many times Tanya and I have had that exact same conversation.

Is this what the psalmist meant when he said *I shall not want?* That we would have so much that we would want for nothing? I don't think so. I think it's about controlling our wants. This psalm is in the language of its day. If we were to put the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm into the language of our own day, the phrase *I shall not want* might go something like this – *Jesus has freed me from thinking I need the latest iPhone or other gadget. He has helped me to understand that I don't need a brand new car or rooms piled high with stuff. He has helped me to understand that I don't need everything the advertisers say I need. He has helped me to say "enough."*

Phone manufacturers and gadget manufacturers and other manufacturers know that because many people feel so compelled to get the latest device they have a ready source of sales for their products. I hear some people apologize, for instance, for their old technology – *oh, mine's not a smart phone. It's just a basic phone. My computer is really old. It's four years old.* Why do we need the latest and greatest gadgets? Perhaps the deeper question to ask is, *why do we accumulate so much?* What spiritual and psychological needs are we attempting to soothe with our incessant buying and accumulating? Is there some deep, unmet need, or needs, in our lives that drive us to find satisfaction in getting more stuff? Is a phone representative of the need for communication, a tool to help us in our daily lives, or is

it the need to feel we are caught up to and equal with everyone else?

We want to keep up with everyone else. People will drive themselves to financial ruin trying to look as successful as the next person. It reminds me of a commercial that ran several years ago. A man grinned as he said *I've got a four-bedroom house. I live in a great neighborhood. Like my car? It's new. I even belong to the country club. How do I do it? I'm in debt up to my eyeballs. I can barely pay my finance charges. Someone please help me.*

We have to survive. We need to eat, we need to have shelter and clothing and medical care. But we also need peace of mind. We need the ability to step off of the treadmill of earning and accumulating. What keeps us from saying *enough*?

### 3. Say “*enough*.”

The image of the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm is one of peace – walking beside a quiet lake and lying down to rest in cool grass. It strikes me as a call to put aside our striving and rest from all of our hurried and frenzied living. But why is that so hard to do? Why are we so driven to live in ways that we know are not good for us?

The call to us in this psalm is to live a life of trust, which is certainly a very difficult way to live. We want to accumulate enough to know that we will be secure in our lives. But can we ever really accumulate enough to guarantee our security? Plenty of people throughout the course of history have lost vast fortunes, so even immense sums of money are not enough to guarantee us security. The best medical care may not be enough to keep us from disease. The most secure home may not keep us secure from the evil and violence of our world.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm, written from the viewpoint of a shepherd, is a reminder that while we live in the midst of uncertainty and even danger, God is always watching over us. Does that guarantee we are always safe from harm? No. What it does mean is that ultimately we rest in God's care. Need, danger, and even violence never have the final word over our lives. Whatever may happen to us in life and whatever struggle we may face, we can live with the confidence that our ultimate security is found in God.

Rudyard Kipling, giving a commencement address at McGill University in Montreal, said there was one striking thing that deserves to be remembered about people. Warning the students against an over-concern for money, power, or popularity, he said, *some day you will meet a man who cares for none of these things. Then you will know how poor you are.*

This beautiful psalm, the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm, reminds us of what truly gives us life, and asks us to say, finally, *enough*.